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ABSTRACT

The Multiple Model Preschool Program (MMPP) is a 3-year research and demonstration project which stresses the prevention of deficits keeping many children from obtaining optimal development and achieving academic success. The MMPP incorporates three emphases: 1) the inclusion and meaningful involvement of parents; the establishment of strong home-school relations; and the provision of individualized educational programing to meet the differing needs of children. The program involves four phases beginning with interaction between teacher, child, and parent in the child's home and leading to a school-based experience. A detailed description of the design and implementation of Phase One illustrates the approach to early childhood programing characterized by this project. (SBH)

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Early Prevention of School Failure:

The Multiple Model Preschool Program

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EARLY PREVENTION OF SCHOOL FAILURE:
THE MULTIPLE MODEL PRESCHOOL PROGRAM

Research from the fields of child development, educational psychology, social work, and the like have long pointed to the important role of parenting skills and involvement in bridging the home-school gap, and to the need for curriculum models which are adaptable to individual learning style needs. Nevertheless, preschool programs have tended to ignore these findings. Few programs focus either on parental involvement, or curriculum development to match individual needs. Most do neither. The Multiple Model Preschool Program does and thus shall be described.

The Multiple Model Preschool Program (MMPP) is a three-year research and demonstration project offering an innovative approach to early childhood education to Wisconsin children in three public school districts. The MMPP applies advanced theory and methodology of early childhood learning and development to the education of the 135 children who began the program in September, 1976, at three years of age and who will remain in it through their kindergarten year.

Representing a cooperative educational venture of the State Legislature, the Wisconsin Department of Instruction, the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, and the Milwaukee, Sheboygan, and Stevens Point public school districts, the MMPP was designed to incorporate in one program three emphases seen as vital to successful early childhood intervention. These emphases, which became the parameters within which the program was operationalized, are:

1). the inclusion and meaningful involvement of parents;

2). the establishment of strong home-school relations; and

3). the provision of individualized educational programming to meet the differing needs of children.

Focusing on children likely to have low levels of academic achievement due to economic and/or social factors, the program began with interaction between teacher, child, and parent in the child's home and gradually phased into a school-based experience;

the vital link between home and school is being maintained throughout the program through the inclusion of parent meetings and home visits. The MMPP is composed of four sequential phases.

The intent of this paper is to provide an introduction to the MMPP. Each of the phases will be briefly described in terms of the particular goals and methods which define it and highlight its unique contribution within the three over-all program parameters listed above. Then, a more comprehensive discussion of the design and implementation of Phase One will be presented to illustrate the approach to early childhood programming characterized by this project.

An Overview of the Phases

Phase One, which began in September, 1976, and was completed in March, 1977, addressed the child in the home environment in recognition of the primary role of the home in early socialization and learning and in an attempt to insure the continuous participation of parents in all aspects of the program. It consisted of home teaching visits involving the parent, child, and teacher in a curriculum individually designed to meet the child's needs, child play groups emphasizing early socialization and free play experiences, and parent discussion groups focusing on parental interaction about child-rearing and educational topics.

Phase Two which was implemented from March-June, 1977, provided the transition from home- to school-based programming and emphasized the gathering of data appropriate to the matching of child to curriculum in Phase Three. It consisted of child

participation in alternative classroom learning environments, continuation of parent discussion groups now focused on parental assumption of the teaching role in the home, and home visits emphasizing parent-child interaction. It is currently being replicated in order to take into consideration maturation which occurred as a function of summer vacation and to increase the data base prior to making the preliminary assignment of children to alternative curricular strategies in Phase Three.

Phase Three, which will begin January, 1978, and continue for one year, provides for planned curriculum alternatives and matching of children to educational models on the basis of individual differences and needs in order to maximize each child's learning and development. At each of the three sites, three different classroom models will be implemented. Phase Three will thus consist of classroom experience, continuation of parent discussion groups, and periodic home visits designed to reinforce parental involvement with their child's education and growth.

Phase Four, which will begin in January, 1979, and end in June of that year, emphasized the child's transition from the MMPP to the primary school curriculum and instructional strategy. In addition to the classroom, parental group, and home components, it involves the inclusion of primary school teachers in the programming.

An Illustration of the Method: Phase One

Frequently, early childhood intervention programs are

subject to criticism on the basis of failing to specify the purposes and procedures followed in their design and implementation, thus preventing meaningful interpretation and subsequent replication of results. In order to avoid this pitfall and to facilitate the provision of optimal educational experiences for children and their families, the directors of the MMPP have concentrated efforts on providing an operational definition of the overall goals through specifying behavioral objectives, generating and describing the methods applied to meet those objectives, and detailing the evaluative techniques to be used in measuring their attainment. A more detailed description of the design and implementation of Phase One serves to illustrate this process as it was applied in Phase One and is being applied in all subsequent phases of the MMPP.

Phase One of the Multiple Model Preschool Program is characterized by its emphasis on the child's learning and development in the home environment. The rationale for this emphasis and the nature of the Phase One curriculum proceeded directly from a thorough analysis of existing thought in the field of early childhood education and its subsequent synthesis into a programmatic thrust. A four-step process was followed in designing Phase One:

STEP ONE: Synthesis of current knowledge about the learning and development of young children with particular reference to factors relevant to increasing developmental opportunities and academic success in economically and socially disadvantaged children.

STEP TWO: Establishment of parameters for a viable early childhood intervention program resulting from consideration of that synthesis.

STEP THREE: Formulation of goals for an early childhood intervention program within those parameters.

STEP FOUR: Generation of program components through which those goals could be met, specification of behavioral objectives within each goal, and identification of evaluative techniques to be applied to measuring their effectiveness.

Implementation of Steps One-Three generated the formulation of program goals which are presented as Table One. Examination of these goals points out the concentration on a variety of interactions and needs extant in the home environment which were identified through the application of theoretical and empirical knowledge.

As the goals indicate, the scope of Phase One was broad. A comprehensive and innovative design incorporating three separate components was generated to meet those goals. The components--home visitation, parent group meetings, and classroom experience--permitted the application and advancement of knowledge consistent with the synthesis of existing thought, the program parameters generated from that synthesis, and the goals formulated within those parameters.

Phase One, however, was not simply another home-based instructional program, nor just another parenting program, nor only one more classroom experience for young children. Rather, Phase One included:

1). simultaneous occurrence of home-based education, classroom experience, and parent group meetings.

2). individualization of the home-based curriculum for each child based on each individual family interaction pattern and each child's developmental pattern, personality, and learning style; and

3). establishment of an immediate transition to and connection with the school through placement of parent group meetings in the school building and involvement of all echelons of school staff in various aspects of program implementation.

The unusual requirements of Phase One mandated the development and training of a relatively new form of early childhood specialist who possessed the combined skills of the educational diagnostician, master teacher, and group leader. The functions of this home visitor included gathering preliminary assessment data, presenting various learning strategies to the child, and encouraging active parental involvement and growth in both parent-child and parent-group interactions. Certified teachers were hired to fill this role; in-service education served as the mechanism for providing them with any additional skills necessary to implement the program.

More than forty behavioral objectives were specified to correspond to the nine goals of Phase One. Particular methods, curriculum guidelines, outlines of parent group meeting topics, and suggestions for developmentally attractive and effective supplies and materials were provided to the sites. In addition and consistent with the mandate of the legislature to provide flexibility in programming which would be appropriate for various communities with differing needs and populations, the MMPP allowed for variations in implementation as long as those

variations were in harmony with program goals and objectives. Thus, the three sites - one large urban, one small urban, and one rural community - have developed their own identities as well as being easily identifiable as three examples of one overall strategy.

The first part of the MMPP was thus an attempt to build a solid foundation for shared educational decision-making which would facilitate the growth and development of individual children. Phase One was based on the assumption that careful delineation and study of the roles and interactions between parents, children, and school personnel could significantly and positively affect children's development and learning.

Progress of individual children and parents toward meeting program goals has been closely monitored; evaluation of most variables relevant to MMPP objectives and methods has been conducted and summarized. A combination of existing standardized tests and specifically developed measurement instruments are being used to evaluate the effectiveness of the program. During Phase One a total of 1,000,000 pieces of data were collected on various aspects of each component - the home visit, the parent group meeting, and the play group - and on the performance of and interactions between all persons involved in the program - children, parents, and teachers.

Children were tested on entrance to the program and at the conclusion of the first year using three standardized tests: the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT) which provides a measure of verbal ability, the Cognitive Skills Assessment Battery, which provides measures of children's

cognitive functioning in a variety of areas such as number knowledge, identification of shapes, visual and auditory memory, etc., and the Denver Developmental Screening Test which provides a profile of the child's development in relation to his/her age peers. At the end of Phase One, the first administration of the Self-Concept Inventory, a standardized observational instrument monitoring children's self-concept in school settings was applied.

In addition, the following record-keeping forms and observational instruments, written by research team members, were applied to the task of gathering as much information as possible relevent to monitoring program implementation and progress toward reaching program goals:

1. Home Interview Form - a comprehensive questionnaire designed to provide a developmental and medical case history of the child.

2. Home Visit Summary - a form detailing the objectives established, the methods applied, and the comments of the teacher with respect to success of each home visit.

3. Parent-Group Meeting Form - a summary sheet providing information on the attendance and involvement of parents in each parent group meeting.

4. Play Group Record - an observational device designed to provide preliminary and ongoing information about children's choice of activities and level of involvement in the free-play situation.

5. Parent-As-Teacher Scale (PATS) - an instrument designed to monitor the shift from teacher to parental responsibility for home-based teaching.

6. Parent-Child-Interaction Scale (PCI) - an observational instrument with three sections (Support, Control, and Involvement) delineating important areas of parent-child interaction designed for use in assessing the nature and quality of the parent-child relationship over time.

7. Child Learning and Style Scales (CLASS) - a collection of scales designed to measure children's learning and development in cognitive, affective, socio-emotional, and psychomotor areas.

Descriptions of all aspects of program design and implementation, reports on the construction and analysis of the newly developed instruments, and the presentation and discussion of all results comprise publications in preparation for publication.

Conclusion

This paper cannot, by definition, convey the excitement of watching previously reluctant three-year-old children eagerly entering school buildings and becoming actively involved in exploration of their environment or the strides in development being made by those children; of seeing parents who had previously been uncomfortable in schools consistently attending parent meetings in those buildings and becoming increasingly involved in discussions, or of families who had experienced little, if any, social interaction outside the home becoming involved in committee work and carrying on aspects of the program during the summer months in the absence of staff

members; or of finding parents and teachers discussing openly and with mutual respect the educational and developmental needs of children, or of viewing teachers with varying and widely divergent philosophies working together to determine the best child/classroom match for individual children. Such results will be described in subsequent presentations and publications.

Instead, this paper had as its intent the presentation of the underpinnings which produce such results: the rationale for and design of the Multiple Model Preschool Program, a flexible and practical preschool intervention program which stresses prevention of the deficits which prevent many children from attaining optimal development and achieving academic success.